



Sharing Difficult News About Yourself with Others

As much as we would like to tuck things away in a little corner of our life where it doesn't touch anything else, this is an impossible task. Eventually, keeping secrets about yourself from others that love you can create feelings of alienation and can make life very complicated. However, sharing this news may be a difficult process depending on the information that you disclose.

These guidelines are only suggestions and are not meant to be a substitute for work that could be done through a professional therapist. It is never a guarantee how others will react to the news that we share so be prepared for varied responses, prepare yourself that others may not react in a favorable manner.

There are many different ways to share difficult news with others. Some are comfortable doing it through casual conversation while others prefer writing it down. Realize that when the information is shared through writing that you should be available to follow up with an in-person discussion afterward.

Be willing to give the person some time to digest the information. They may respond by saying, "I'd like to think about this for a while," give them some space and ask them to let you know when they are ready to talk:

- **Be sensitive to the other person's feelings.**
 - It can be nearly as hard for them to hear it as it is for you to tell them. Realize that they are probably wondering what they did wrong or how they could have prevented you from feeling so much pain.
- **Explain that by sharing this information it is an act of love.**
 - Let them know that you're deciding to tell them your news as a sign of your love for and trust in them. That you need their loving support, and are tired of keeping a whole part of yourself from them. The desire to be open and to trust outweighs the fear of rejection or hatred or disgust. Let the person you're telling know you're not trying to punish, manipulate, or guilt-trip them.
- **Pick a place that is private and a time that is unhurried.**
 - Find a time when everyone involved is available for a long conversation. Do it in a place where everyone's comfortable and there's no need to worry about being overheard. If you're rushed or hurried or afraid other people nearby will hear and react, your not going to be able to give your full attention to the conversation and neither will anyone else.
- **Don't tell others in anger.**
 - Don't use your news as weapon, "Oh, yeah, well look, you made me_____". To get the love and understanding you are seeking, you may have to give some in return. Whether or not the person you have decided to share your secret with has contributed to the problem that led to your situation is irrelevant to this conversation. If you start getting angry and blaming, you're going to put the other person on the defensive and they'll get angry. The whole process will bog down and be hideously unpleasant and unproductive. Using your news as a weapon also increases the likelihood that the person you're sharing the information with will react in exactly the ways you're hoping they won't.

- **Consider enlisting an ally.**
 - If you have a friend or a therapist who understands your situation you might want to ask them to sit in on the conversation. A neutral third person can help keep things calm.
- **Provide as much information as you can.**
 - This is crucial. The more someone knows about something, the less they fear it. They may have read about it in the tabloids or heard things on the news. Be prepared to give the person books or names of books, articles, photocopies, printouts, or websites, etc. Gather as much information as you can so you can answer their questions accurately.
- **We willing (and prepared) to answer questions.**
 - You may need to educate them. Encourage them to ask whatever questions they may have. If they ask a question you don't have an answer to say, "I don't know" or "I can't say" or even "I prefer not to get into that right now". Be as open as you can. You might want to anticipate questions they'll ask and get an idea of how you want to answer those before you share your information. You should also have an idea of what you want them to do about it—they might ask, Do you want treatment/therapy?, What sort?, If not, why not?, Do you want them to help you?, How can they help?, What's too intrusive and what isn't?.
- **It's not necessary to bring up the most disturbing topics in the first conversation.**
- **Trust your own judgment.**
 - Do what feels natural to you. You know yourself and your family and friends far better than anyone else.
- **Communicate.**
 - Be willing to share how it feels disclosing this information with others. Ask them to let you know what they're thinking. Communication goes both ways.

Sources:

www.palace.net/~llama/psych/

*information also adapted from Bass and Kaufman 1996